

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 281 432

HE 020 336

AUTHOR Peters, Dianne S.; Peterson, Margaret A.
TITLE Monitoring and Evaluating Doctoral Student Progress
in Programs for the Study of Higher Education. ASHE
1987 Annual Meeting Paper.
PUB DATE Feb 87
NOTE 34p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the
Association for the Study of Higher Education (San
Diego, CA, February 13-17, 1987).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) --
Speeches/Conference Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Advising; Admission Criteria; Doctoral
Dissertations; *Doctoral Programs; *Evaluation
Methods; Grading; *Graduate Students; Group
Membership; Higher Education; *Interprofessional
Relationship; Peer Relationship; *Postsecondary
Education as a Field of Study; Socialization;
*Student Evaluation; Tests
IDENTIFIERS *ASHE Annual Meeting

ABSTRACT

Ways that U.S. programs for the study of higher education monitor and evaluate the progress of their doctoral students through the dissertation stage were studied in 1986. Fifty-seven program directors responded to a questionnaire, and 50 responded to a followup questionnaire that solicited information about the social context for the doctoral students. Routines included such formal benchmarks as admissions criteria, advisement procedures, grading practices, types of examinations, and characteristics of the dissertation process. While superficial analysis suggested that the benchmarks were formal bureaucratic routines, the responses suggested that for nearly all formal guidelines there existed various exceptions that made monitoring and evaluative procedures flexible and student-oriented. Social context, or cultural milieu, was identified as an important factor in how doctoral students learned to become professional practitioners. Three aspects of social context of programs for the study of higher education were identified: becoming a member of the social group, exercising the rights and privileges of group membership, and exiting the program (but perhaps not the group). (SW)

* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *

ED201432

Monitoring and Evaluating Doctoral Student Progress in
Programs for the Study of Higher Education

by

Dianne S. Peters and Margaret A. Peterson

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as
received from the person or organization
originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve
reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this docu-
ment do not necessarily represent official
OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

DIANNE S. PETERS

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

San Diego, California

Association for the Study of Higher Education

February, 1987

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

HE 020 336



**ASSOCIATION
FOR THE
STUDY OF
HIGHER EDUCATION**

The George Washington
University
One Dupont Circle, Suite 630
Washington, D.C. 20036-1183
(202) 296-2597

This paper was presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education held at the San Diego Hilton in San Diego, California, February 14-17, 1987. This paper was reviewed by ASHE and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with the research of higher education. It has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC collection of ASHE conference papers.

Annual Meeting • February 14-17, 1987
San Diego Hilton • San Diego, California

Monitoring and Evaluating Doctoral Student Progress in
Programs for the Study of Higher Education

In the spring of 1986, the population of 90 U.S. programs¹ for the study of Higher Education received questionnaires designed to elicit information about the procedures they used to monitor and evaluate the progress of doctoral students through the programs. Responses from 57 program directors (a 63% response rate) supplied information which overlapped and so provided continuity with information presented by the earlier Crosson and Nelson² study describing the general contours of Higher Education programs throughout the country. The responses also extended the Crosson and Nelson study into the ways students enrolled in Higher Education programs completed or withdrew from them. This extended information included such formal "milestones" or "benchmarks" as admissions criteria, advisement procedures, types of examinations taken, and characteristics of dissertation proposals, together with the purposes, timelines, and effects of the processes. Preliminary analysis of data indicated that only superficially were the benchmarks formal bureaucratic routines; responses suggested that for nearly all formal guidelines there existed various exceptions to render monitoring and evaluative procedures flexible and student-oriented. Further analysis identified social context as an important factor in the programs' monitoring procedures. In the autumn of 1986, follow-up questionnaires solicited information about social context

from those program directors who had asked for summaries of the benchmark data analysis. Of these 50 respondents (a 44% response rate), 22 agreed to participate in telephone interviews which provided further details about the social context of programs for the study of Higher Education in the U.S.

The purpose of this report is to describe not only the routines of monitoring and evaluating doctoral students of Higher Education but also the social contexts in which these routines occur.

The Conceptual Frame and Methodology

Guided at first by Conrad's explanation of grounded theory³ and by Schon's⁴ views about the place of artistry and reflective practice in educating professionals, we gathered information about routine monitoring procedures so as to provide a background for uncovering whatever unique attributes or processes individual programs might have to nurture their doctoral students. Conrad's grounded theory is essentially anthropological;⁵ researchers elicit and then categorize primary data to describe and explain a culture or subculture in terms of itself and not in terms of an arbitrarily imposed external system. Schon's explanation of the nature of professional education concerns the artistic design process wherein the education - and thus the monitoring and evaluating - of professional practitioners is characterized largely by learning that professional practice is a form of experimentation.

As the information from Higher Education Program directors accumulated, it became apparent that social context (i.e., cultural milieu) contributed significantly to how doctoral students learned to become professional practitioners. Anthropologically, social context differs from social structure. The latter is concerned with formal relationships between and among individuals, and thus social structure is devoted largely to analyzing kinship systems.⁶ Social context, by contrast, concerns relationships between the individual and the work or play group of which that individual is part.⁷ Researchers derive social context by asking primary respondents how individuals "join" a group (i.e., what are the rites of passage?), what responsibilities and privileges group members have, and in what ways individuals leave a group; all the while allowing respondents themselves to define the notion of group in their own way so as to conform to the anthropological dictum of describing the culture, subculture, or group in terms of itself.

Program Demographics and Monitoring Routines

Demographics: An analysis of demographic data gathered from the initial mailed survey instrument tends to parallel Crosson and Nelson's analysis of Higher Education programs in the U.S. Approximately 20 percent of the programs are free-standing; the remaining 80 percent are merged, usually with departments having such labels as educational

administration, leadership, or policy studies.

Approximately half of these Higher Education programs offer both the Ph.D. and the Ed.D. degree; the remainder tend to offer the Ed.D. degree moreso than the Ph.D. degree by a two-to-one ratio. The number of "core" (usually full-time) faculty ranged from one to eight with a mean of 3.3, whereas the number of "affiliated" or "adjunct" (usually part-time) faculty ranged from one to eleven with a mean of 4.75. In all, these findings, which are based on the 1984 listing, are similar enough to those of Crosson and Nelson, based on the 1980 listing, warrant stating that Higher Education programs of this decade are reasonably stable.

Further, programs included in the present study exhibited no skewed patterns. That is to say, all geographic regions of the country were represented equitably; small and large, prestigious and less so programs were also equitably distributed. Respondents were inevitably program directors themselves and not student designates. These programs were situated in urban, suburban, and rural locales. In general, the programs of the present study would appear to represent a cross-section of all U.S. programs for the study of Higher Education.

Admissions: Criteria for admitting applicants to doctoral study in Higher Education are listed in order of descending importance in Table 1, which reveals that most programs of Higher Education utilize the standard criteria of Graduate and/or Post-Baccalaureate Grade-Point Average

5

(GPA), plus the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) for making their selections. Other criteria include undergraduate GPA, samples of writing, letters of reference, interviews and work experience.

Table 1
Admissions Criteria Applied by U.S. Programs for the Study
of Higher Education (N=57)

Criterion	Percentage of Program Utilizing
1. Graduate or Post-Baccalaureate GPA	93 percent
2. Graduate Record Exam	93
3. Undergraduate GPA	72
4. Written Essay or a Sample of Applicant's Writing	65
5. Letters of Reference/Recommendation	50
6. Formal Interview	50
7. Professional Work Experience	20

Grades: In keeping with what one might expect, grades at the graduate level constitute not so much a matter of identifying the exemplary or honors group of students as a matter of easing out those students who do not have an affinity for the study of higher education. In other words, as long as a student receives A's, B's, or a "pass", grades are relatively unimportant except to administrators (e.g., graduate dean, department head) who use them for a "routine

matter of counting", as one respondent said. Grades become important only when they fall below the institution's standard for B work (a GPA range of 3.0 - 3.5 on a 4.0 scale) or when they are registered as "incomplete". Although institutional criteria stipulate that certain processes be enacted whenever a certain number of C's or "incompletes" are recorded on a transcript (e.g., more than one C grade means that "the student must confer with his/her adviser" or "... is on probation"), it is clear that the purpose of grades in Higher Education doctoral study is to indicate inadequate performance, and thus the tacit assumption is that doctoral students will receive A's and B's in their coursework. Indeed, taken as a whole, data across virtually all programs reveal that there are as many A's as B's recorded; C's and below, plus incompletes, constitute 10 percent of the overall grade distribution. These findings about grading practices suggest a reasonably effective recruiting and admissions process.

Advisement: Upwards of 90 percent of all programs for the study of Higher Education actively plan for the advisement of entering and on-going students. Sixty percent of the programs formally assign an advisor at entrance, and respondents from these programs speak of their attempts to "get a good match" not just between student and faculty advisor who tends, then, to be the student's permanent advisor at least to the dissertation stage of doctoral study. Thirty-three percent of Higher Education programs

assign a temporary advisor who is often an administrator - e.g., a department chair, an assistant dean, a program coordinator. The remaining few programs have a range of advisement procedures which tend to utilize faculty who function as "mentors" or "sponsors" to doctoral students. Each of these advisement categories employs flexible procedures for changing advisors should that action become necessary.

Predominantly, advisement exists for two purposes, planning the student's coursework and evaluating the appropriateness of the proposed dissertation topic. These findings, although not here tabulated, are significant at the .01 level of confidence. Other purposes for advisement include preparing the student for a major examination and assessing the student's choice of career path or direction. Furthermore, there seems a trend for advisors to change immediately after the successful completion of a major exam and/or immediately before embarking on the dissertation process. In all, advisement for doctoral students in programs of Higher Education seems to be flexible and effective.

Examinations: In doctoral programs for the study of Higher Education, major examinations have different titles or labels and achieve different purposes. The most predominant label is "Comprehensive Examination" and this term tends invariably to mean subject-matter mastery; that is, "comps" (as they may be called in campus slang) have one

purpose - to measure subject-matter competence - and that purpose means that students must pass this milestone by demonstrating that they can "do higher education."

Subject-matter mastery tests the students' basic understanding of

- > the history and substance of the field,
- > the major issues confronting the field,
- > the field's dimensions: curriculum, governance systems, policy formation, the professoriate, etc.,
- > analytical and research skills sufficient to embark on a dissertation,
- > applying an integration or synthesis of the field's several aspects to policy decision-making and/or practical problems.

Doctoral exams also carry the label of "Preliminary Examinations," but the meaning of this term (or its slang expression "prelims") are taken at entrance to or very early in a program (within one or two quarters), and in this category the purpose of prelims is to assess whether or not the student possesses the thinking and writing skills necessary for adequate subsequent performance. Prelims also means measuring subject-matter competence, especially in a core of coursework; in this sense, prelims means approximately the same as comps. Occasionally, the term means assessing not just subject-matter competence but also the full panoply of methodological sophistication for engaging in research (i.e., the dissertation) and in this

1
rare sense the term connotes achieving the final milestone before defending the dissertation.

Another label for the doctoral examinations is a Qualifying Examination (or "quals") and this is the most ambiguous of all terms describing a major set of exams. The meaning of "quals" ranges from a kind of prelim taken within the first quarter of study to a comprehensive exam to measure subject-matter mastery and dissertation research expertise. Between these two extremes qualifying exams:

- > complete the admission process,
- > assess weaknesses,
- > coordinate coursework with personal interests,
- > measure cognitive competence in major and minor areas,
- > assess the student's ability to conceptualize coursework and independent study as a unified whole (emphasis in original).

Quals is also a term most associated with the idea of candidacy, and this association tends to set the meaning of quals apart from the other two terms. That is, if one were to ask, "What does successfully negotiating these exams qualify you for?" the answer is, "To achieve or be admitted to candidacy." Candidacy apparently is an honorific of sorts, but exactly what the label means is unclear from data at hand.

Despite differences in meanings, there are commonalities among the three major examination types. The

first is that, with occasional exceptions, the format for all examinations is similar: a proctored, two-day-long written exercise scheduled for students in groups. The next commonality is that most exams carry an oral dimension which occurs after the completion of the written exercise, often for the purpose of clarification. Exams also tend to occur under a prescribed set of conditions such as "after 39 credits of specified (not just any) coursework," or "with the approval of a faculty advisory committee." The failure rate for students taking examinations as a whole ranges from 10 to 25 percent in most programs. Finally, at the successful completion of examinations, whatever the label, 75 percent (N = 43) of doctoral programs allow their Higher Education students to initiate the dissertation process.

The Dissertation: The dissertation process appears to occur in two stages, the proposal and the defense. Of these, the proposal stage is the more important as a monitoring routine, and the oral defense almost a pro forma exercise. That is to say, our respondents did not prefer nearly so much information about the oral defense as they did about the proposal, and their language connoted that passing a proposal was more crucial than defending the finished thesis. Respondents also uniformly referred to the proposal as a proposal; only one or two respondents called it a prospectus.

Although a student's work on the proposal can begin at almost any stage of his or her progress through a higher

education program, the formal monitoring process of proposal writing and presentation to a faculty committee tends to occur at or near the major examination. Some programs (17 percent, $N = 9$) require presenting a proposal at the same time as the oral clarification for the major examination, whereas others (17 percent, $N = 9$) allow presenting a proposal prior to successful completion of the major exams. Most programs (64 percent, $N = 35$) allow presenting a proposal only after the student has successfully passed the milestone of a major exam. This last practice suggests, however tacitly, the relationship between the major exam and the proposal: the major exam measures one's mastery of the subject matter and the proposal measures one's capacity to contribute to that subject matter. Put another way, the major examination qua subject matter is a basic component for one's engaging the creative process within that subject matter.⁸

The format of the proposal is highly structured and follows the rubric of quantitative, empirical research reports. That is, for 44 percent ($N = 23$) of the programs surveyed, the dissertation proposal was required to meet the rather rigid structure of Chapters One, Two, and Three in an empirical study (problem statement, review of the literature, empirical research procedures) or their full equivalent. This structure seems to be adhered to whether or not the proposed dissertation was to be empirically based. Another 19 percent ($N = 10$) of the programs reported

10

that their requirements for a formal proposal were the equivalent of the empirical structure, albeit some adaptations were permissible. These adaptations included statements such as: "Chapter Two is not fully complete," or "Chapters One and Two only are presented." In all, nearly two-thirds of all programs responding to our survey stated that the governing structure for a dissertation proposal was the structure for presenting empirically based research.

By contrast, other programs (approximately one-third) permitted greater flexibility in the proposal. As one respondent put it "A proposal is not 60 percent of the completed product," and we could almost hear an accompanying tag shouting, "... for crying out loud!" Other respondents described their programs' proposal formats as, "A fifteen-page outline of Chapters One, Two, and Three," or as, "A three to eight-page overview with an Annotated Bibliography." It would appear, then, that where the empirical study format is not fully operative, the proposal format tends to allude (or at least give a passing nod) to that method of organizing and presenting a design for research.

Almost half of the respondents (45 percent) also informed us that doctoral students at the dissertation phase of their programs were encouraged to share their topic or design with their peers. These interchanges occurred for feedback purposes in a formal (e.g., classroom or colloquium) or informal (e.g., brownbag) setting. Finally,

we learned that 60 percent (N = 32) of these programs imposed a time limit of two to five years (usually from the point of passing exams) for completing the dissertation.

Interim Summary: All told, the monitoring routines (admissions, advisement, grading practices, examinations, dissertation) utilized for marking the progress of doctoral students through programs for the study of higher education appear standardized, even bureaucratic. Yet nearly every respondent took the time to write comments on the questionnaire that, in general, suggested avenues for further research (e.g., more in-depth investigations of candidacy, residency requirements, and placement records) or, more importantly, insisted on our investigating the social context in which these so-called monitoring procedures occurred. In this latter category we noted comments such as:

- > The questionnaire doesn't provide for eliciting the context for non-typical programs.
- > We've developed a way to be more student-oriented than most other graduate programs (read, the so-called hard sciences).
- > The questionnaire's emphasis on "exams" violates the basic understanding of how people learn.
- > In our program, it's unusual to flunk someone out, although it does happen; more often, students are "discouraged" by their advisers and their peers.
- > My answers to the questions make our program look

more formal and bureaucratic than it really is. Each answer I've given has various exceptions.

From such commentary we realized, despite the routines of monitoring, many respondents wanted us to know that the social context for their programs fostered a learning environment that could be described as student-oriented, as distinguished from a subject-matter or an instructor-centered orientation. Moreover, the respondents conveyed a sense of urgent pride in delivering this message. Thus we concluded that a follow-up, open-ended questionnaire would be sent to those respondents who had asked for the results of our initial analysis. The questionnaire asked "social context" questions in the classical anthropological manner. To wit: (1) How does the newly admitted doctoral student become a member of the social group? (2) What rights and privileges accrue with membership? and (3) In what ways do/can members exit from the group? Moreover, we also asked respondents to participate in telephone interviews of 15 to 20 minutes duration so as to amplify their written commentary to the follow-up questionnaire.

SOCIAL CONTEXT

Responses to each of the above questions exist, then, as written commentary and as telephone interview data about the topic known as social context. Examining social context means exploring the relationships between the individual (here, the doctoral student) and the group (here, a

combination of faculty and other doctoral students) who work in a higher education program.

Most programs of higher education develop a social context nurturing their students' interpersonal skills. In turn, these skills underscore cooperation and sharing, as distinguished from competitiveness and its often accompanying isolation, mainly because (as one respondent put it) "cooperation is the way things work best in higher education administration." Some doctoral students in higher education seem to be born with interpersonal skills, others are so academically gifted that such skills are superfluous for their completing the doctorate, but most students need the support of a social group if they are to complete the degree and continue with their careers. Furthermore, nearly all of the respondents we interviewed convinced us of the importance of social context, of the importance of a student's identifying with and belonging to a social group during his or her doctoral study. Comments such as "We think interpersonal skills are so important that we weave them into all our higher education courses" or "You cannot overemphasize the importance of social context" are indicative of the overall theme embedded in these programs: success or completing the doctorate usually hinges on a student's being accepted both academically and socially. That is to say, not only must students meet academic standards and pass academic milestones, but also they must participate in "social" activities so as to demonstrate

their ability to function smoothly in a workaday environment.

Entering the Group: Rites of passage into being accepted as part of a program's social group are behaviors which link academic with social activities. At first, it would appear, that these behaviors cluster on classroom or instructional activities, but later, the behaviors reach out toward what we might initially call "professionalism". Introductory courses (e.g., statistics, organizational theory) tend to foster study groups which begin as conversations before and after class sessions and gradually develop toward students sharing responsibilities for reading this or that literature or for producing joint research papers. During this phase students participate in informal "happy hours" wherein one "buys a round" or informal lunchtime sessions wherein one brings a plate of brownies or cookies to share. Often too, faculty arrange small or large gatherings at their homes - picnics, dinners, parties and the like - and it is the rare student who does not attend. It is also the rare student who fails to attend to matters of grooming at such gatherings or in the classroom or library. It seems to be a matter of some pride in higher education programs that the doctoral students are well-groomed and well spoken - these, so as to "connect" with behaviors expected of careers in academic administration. This introductory phase is often called "getting connected."

17

Students extend these early behaviors or "connections" by other behaviors. They speak out, for example, and take responsibility for what they have said, and the topic of their talk is the literature in higher education. Students begin taking the literature seriously - that is, they are not "name dropping" to puff up their self-esteem - and they share their reading with others. They do favors for one another - e.g., taping or taking notes for a class session that a fellow student cannot attend. They attend brown-bag seminars and help to organize them. They help with a research project a faculty member has underway. They attend and become part of the governance structure of graduate student organizations. They attend local, regional, and eventually national conferences. They learn to listen and to tolerate a wide range of ideas and attitudes. In short, they make a commitment of time and energy, they combine theory and practice, they begin a process of self-evaluation often by regarding the academic milestones as opportunities for growth rather than "hurdles" to get through, all of which connect them to the tenets of working as a professional practitioner in a higher education setting.

Group Membership: As these rites of passage behaviors become ingrained and students become relatively less isolated and more comfortable with them and with the absence of a competitive spirit (which, if present, would destroy the social group), so also do students become more comfortable with each other and the faculty. Recognizing

10

that one is part of the group and being so recognized, however, carries certain privileges and responsibilities. Privileges center on the idea of access, mostly to other persons, whereas responsibilities seem to connote a fairly wide range of emotions and emotionalism.

Privileges which accrue to the student who becomes connected are best subsumed in the idea of access. That is, once accepted into the group, the student has or believes he or she has access to other students, and to faculty, and to what these people stand for. Access to other students, for example, means that one need no longer fear rejection, that one can ask for a favor knowing it will be granted. Access to other students also means camaraderie, and such support from one's peers seems to be a crucial factor at the dissertation stage, for then other students encourage or hassle the dissertation writer to "get on with it" and finish. Other students also have information useful for:

- putting together an individualized program of study,
- choosing members of a faculty advisory committee,
- avoiding this or that faculty person or course,
- assuming leadership roles in student organizations,
- increasing one's knowledge of a research area in the field.

Access to faculty is a privilege easily come by when a student is in an apprentice position (e.g., graduate assistantship) to "hang around" the office and "soak up" the ambience, but relatively difficult for the part-time student

whose time on campus is limited or sporadic. Although most programs have varying ways of accommodating part-timers (George Washington and Seattle Universities may well represent two extremes in this regard) it is sometimes quite difficult for part-time students to "connect" firmly with faculty beyond the higher education program itself. Nonetheless, having access to faculty means that a student has access:

- to information about a given research area in all its complexity,
- to faculty research interests,
- to internship opportunities,
- to conference attendance and its subsequent introductions to so-called "names" in the field,
- to career opportunities often because faculty take a personal interest in a student's professional life.

In all, having access to faculty and being comfortable with them means that the student becomes less "the student" and more "the junior colleague." This phenomenon occurs for nearly everyone in the program and thus higher education programs are strongly characterized as collegial and cooperative.

Colleagues (faculty and students) in a program speak freely and honestly; as well, they expect their words to be taken seriously. They work with one another on and off campus, sharing job problems and finding solutions for these problems or preparing to present a research project first at

a campus brown-bag and then in a conference setting. In all, having access to other students and to faculty means that when one participates in accessibility, one becomes more professional and cosmopolitan, whereas curbing one's activities in this area tends to mean that one's outlook remains relatively local and narrow.

Privileges of membership in a social group are balanced by responsibilities, however, and in higher education programs these responsibilities seem charged with emotion. As we interviewed respondents about their programs we were struck by the frequency of such words as "pride, loyalty, concern". In essence, it would appear that membership in a higher education program carries more responsibility than just knowing and sharing the literature of the field. One is also responsible for exceeding academic expectations and producing high quality work. One must also "stay connected" by supporting one's fellow students and by being loyal to them not just in returning a favor or sharing notes from a class session, but by "being there" when a personal tragedy strikes or by confronting a superficial comment with intellectual honesty. There is, then, pride in working together to make the best showing whether that showing is getting good grades, running for office in student organizations, participating on a research team, accepting adverse criticism with good grace precisely because it comes from someone who cares, or planning a campus brown-bag or conference. Moreover, respondents also suggested that such

81

pride, loyalty and concern carried over into one's professional career and so constitute a source for becoming socialized into the profession. Put simply, exercising one's privileges and responsibilities in the social group is tantamount to taking part in the rituals of fulfilling public expectations, the term "public" meaning the network of colleagues in the field.

Leaving the Group: It remains to consider how people exit or leave the social group of which they have become a part, and our interviews with respondents indicate two views about this topic. The first perspective can be characterized metaphorically as that of the "extended family". That is, once a student becomes a member of the group and exercises the pertinent privileges and responsibilities, he or she never exits. Such cliches as "once a colleague, always a colleague" or "once part of the family, never apart from the family" describe this perspective clearly. Respondents holding to this view also tended to explain it in such a phrase as, "If the student doesn't join and be accepted by the group, there's nothing to exit from."

By contrast, other respondents view the exit process more formally and wonder whether their "compatriots who espouse an informal, extended family perspective are on "an ego trip of some sort." The more formal "exit" perspective may be divided into two classes. The first is that a student exits the group when he or she completes the

doctorate. The second category is more complicated because it concerns those students who exit without completing the doctorate.

Reasons for not completing the degree serve to be quite varied, and the most obvious one is that a student did not "get connected" at entrance or during coursework. This reason suggests that failure to become one of the social group results in attrition, but it is not the only reason for exit. Others are personal - one has a personal tragedy or moves to another job. Some are academic - a student has academic weaknesses and so is counseled out or realizes the weakness and leaves. Respondents also indicated that some students finally realized that a higher education program, despite its flexibility and capacity to accommodate a wide range of career aspirations, was not able to fulfill that individual's career or personal goals and so the person moved on. Still other students left because they could not cope with the "realities of writing a dissertation."

Nevertheless, the respondents we interviewed seemed concerned about students completing the degree and shared with us the mechanisms they used to bring or keep students "up to speed." Proseminars, for example, delineate the tenets of higher education as a field of study, not an academic discipline. Capstone courses remind students of this distinction and/or urge them to develop their own philosophy of higher education. Another example of enhancing degree completion includes Seattle University's

82

continuous enrollment requirement, wherein a student must formally resign from the program, an action far more difficult than "fading out" of a program quietly. Still other examples are Montana State University's "Professional Development Review" (PDR) wherein faculty and students evaluate other students prior to comprehensive exams in order to identify and strengthen what could be weak areas (e.g., in the written or spoken word) and Florida State University's "ABD Bootstrap" program, which is a seminar held in early summer where ABD students spend two weeks on campus working with a professor and having access to the library in an effort toward completion of a "put aside" dissertation. Last time Florida State held the seminar, 18 of 18 ABD's who attended the seminar, completed the dissertation. These and other reasons for leaving a program in higher education have been topics for research; Jack Cooper at Washington State and Dayton Roberts at Texas Tech have information to share with us in this regard.

Factors Influencing Social Context: These three aspects of social context of programs for the study of higher education - becoming a member of the social group, exercising the rights and privileges of group membership, and then exiting the program (but perhaps not the group) - underscore the importance of well-honed interpersonal skills for a career in higher education administration. Combined with the successful completion of academic milestones (coursework, examinations, dissertation) social context

81

attempts to ensure that students with a degree in higher education be acceptable for a career in the field - a career which, as one respondent suggests, is of upper middle-class status with all the connotations in speech patterns, dress and grooming codes, and social habits that that status demands. And yet the combination of academic and social behaviors that produces an individual who performs with grace under fire is affected by still other factors not always within the full control of program faculty and administrators.

It is of importance to bear in mind that programs for the study of higher education in the United States are diverse, and given the nature of American higher education, such diversity should not be surprising. Given the nature of graduate programs in other subject matters, however, such diversity is almost astonishing. Time and again respondents spoke of their programs' capacity for accommodating a wide range of career options and of the varied nature of their student body both of which affect the overall context of the program. For example, faculty - and this is a small average number - must provide role models for various kinds of careers in administration (e.g., academic affairs, institutional planning and research), instruction (e.g., educational technology) and research-scholarly endeavor (e.g., policy studies in higher education, student development and residence life). While faculty realize they cannot be all things to all people, they sometimes feel

stretched beyond shape in accommodating the varied interests of their students.⁹

The diversity of students enrolled in higher education programs is evidently an important influencing factor for monitoring and evaluating student progress. Although many doctoral students in higher education programs have prior work experience in a higher education setting, those jobs cross administration and instruction, traditional and vocational subject-matter areas, institutional type, and geographic region. Although many students come from liberal arts backgrounds (and so may have social skills bred into them by virtue of the social status such "majors" may connote), virtually no students begin the formal study of higher education until the doctoral level. Accommodating this wide range of student backgrounds in coursework that itself ranges from introductory to sophisticated, usually within the time frame of an academic year is more than just a little demanding.

Moreover, diversity in student body also means whether the program offers either the Ph.D. or the Ed.D. If both, then the proportion of students enrolled in each affects social context. Similarly, if a program offers Master's degree work (i.e., in student personnel) as does Iowa State's, the proportion between Master's and doctoral students influences social context. The proportion between full-time (or nearly so) and part-time students also affects social context. Programs such as those at West Virginia or

26

George Washington which enroll part-time doctoral students are different in social milieus from the milieu of Montana State where full-time students tend to predominate. Similarly, whether coursework is offered to part- or full-time students, on-campus or at off-campus sites during the "regular" work week (evenings) or on weekends, affect the development of cooperative social activities that underscore academic successes.

In all, the combinations and permutations of all these independent variables tend to make programs for the study of higher education unique as individual programs but similar in terms of the diversity of options offered and the diversity of students served.

Toward Conclusions: This investigation of the ways United States programs for the study of higher education monitor and evaluate the progress of their doctoral students through the dissertation reveals two so-called curriculums. The first, represented by formal milestones, is a sequence of cognitive-based subject matters which resemble academic disciplines making up the field of higher education. These so-called disciplines (e.g., history, finance, sociology, statistics) are like lenses encircling the subject matter called higher education to provide different perspectives illuminating the contours and tenets of the field. Milestones such as advisement, coursework (including formal internships), and examinations measure a student's grasp of subject matter, and the dissertation becomes a capstone, as

it were, for measuring a student's capacity for contributing to the field vis a vis a focus through one of its lenses.

The second curriculum, which more than one respondent termed the "hidden curriculum"¹⁰ is a social context wherein a student has opportunities for practising the cognitive dimensions in a controlled setting. Figuratively speaking, the social context or hidden curriculum is an arena for practise before practice, for trying out cooperative ventures before the stakes are too high, for engaging the behavioral dimensions of the academic career. To summarize, if higher education can be described as understanding in action, then the cognitive curriculum represents understanding and the hidden curriculum, in action.

These two curriculum tend to work in concert in most U.S. programs. Although it is possible for some academically gifted students to complete the dissertation engaging only the cognitive curriculum, the usual pattern is this: student involvement in social context spells success; lack of involvement spells failure. Success and failure seem to be measured in both the short and the long range. In the short range, social context connotes a support group of people who minimize the isolation of dissertation writing by encouraging or harrasing the dissertation writer through to completion. In the long range, social context connotes a network of people supportive for the academic career. As a whole, evaluation in programs for the study of higher education is very much a matter of colleague and/or peer

evaluation, as the individual student becomes (or fails to become) a colleague of program faculty and, more importantly, of other students in the program.

These two curriculums seem also to work in concert to produce leaders (as researcher-scholars, as administrator-managers, and as faculty persons) for this country's colleges and universities. To varying degrees, degree-holders in higher education tend to cope well with both diversity and ambiguity - diversity for example via the diversity of fellow students in any given program of study, and ambiguity for example via the obvious surfeit of meaning accruing to any subject matter that is a field rather than an academic discipline. In concert, the two curriculums work toward producing leaders who demonstrate an understanding and tolerance of a wide range of values and so-called value systems that often become manifest as grace under fire.

Toward Future Research: Candidacy and research design/methodology are areas for future study. More precisely, research questions about candidacy might include: (1) how is the term defined? (2) what is its relationship to qualifying exams? (3) what is its significance and to whom? Research design/methodology is a more complicated area for study because one needs to ask not only about the parameters but also about the source of evaluation. That is, when we speak of research in higher education, are we talking about empirical investigations using statistical analysis only or

are we also including hermeneutics (e.g., ethnohistories) and normative or Critical Theory studies. And if all three of these theoretical research stances,¹¹ in what proportion? Understanding the patterns for giving research sophistication to students in programs of higher education seems to be an important area for investigation.

Attrition and degree completion studies might also prove fruitful. Understanding which of our students are likely to drop out and why as well as which are likely to complete and why can help with the advisement process. Moreover, understanding the "ABD" phenomenon may give us clues not just to dissertation completion but to the administrative career in academe in all its facets.

Finally, we would suggest further research into the role of higher education program faculty in the programs' social context. Several of our respondents alluded to the nature of the faculty role by such almost conflicting statements as: "Faculty consciously develop this hidden curriculum" or "Faculty really have no idea how important they are to this social dimension of the program." Thus, we would suggest asking such research questions as these: Do faculty contribute deliberately and systematically to the development of social context or is their involvement informal and reactive? Are older more practice-oriented professors of higher education more likely to be aware of social context - and so contribute to it more pro-actively - than are younger faculty at lesser professional ranks. Do

program coordinators or full-time faculty plan discussions about social context for faculty meetings or is such discussion ad hoc? Should such discussion be one or the other and toward what end(s)? In all, it would appear that more than a descriptive analysis of cognitive and hidden curriculums, and their relationships, is in order if we are to understand and improve programs for the study of higher education.

Notes

¹ Directory of Higher Education Programs and Faculty, 5th ed., Washington, DC: Association for the Study of Higher Education, 1984, pp. 1-8.

² P.H. Crosson and G. Nelson, "A Profile of Higher Education Doctoral Programs," The Review of Higher Education, Vol. 9, No. 3 (1986), pp. 335-357.

³ C.F. Conrad, "A Grounded Theory of Academic Change," Sociology of Education, Vol. 51 (1978), pp. 101-112.

⁴ D. Schon, "Education for Reflective Practice: Lessons from Artistry." A paper presented at Chicago: American Association for Higher Education Conference, 1985.

⁵ See especially D. Kaplan and R. Manners, Culture Theory, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1972, pp. 11-12; H.F. Wolcott, "Ethnographers sans Ethnography: The Evaluation Compromise," in D.M. Fetterman (ed.), Ethnography in Educational Evaluation, Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1984, pp. 177-210; and B. Glaser and A. Strauss, Discovery of Grounded Theory, Chicago: Aldine, 1967.

⁶ See F.G. Lounsbury, "A Formal Account of the Crow- and Omaha-Type Kinship Terminologies," in W.H. Goodenough (ed.), Explorations in Cultural Anthropology Essays in Honor of George Peter Murdock, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964, pp. 351-393.

⁷ Claude Levi-Strauss, Structural Anthropology, (tr.) C. Jacobson and B.G. Schoepf, New York: Basic Books, 1963, pp. 281-303.

⁸ Brewster Ghiselin (ed.), The Creative Process, New York: New American Library, 1952, pp. 1-30.

⁹ Jack H. Cooper, "Special Problems of Professors of Higher Education," in The Review of Higher Education, Vol. 4, No. 1 (1980), pp. 25-32.

¹⁰ Benson Snyder, The Hidden Curriculum. New York: Knopf, 1970.

¹¹ Jonas Soltis, "On the Nature of Educational Research," Educational Researcher, Vol. 13 (1984), pp. 69-71.